

**U.S. EMBASSY BAGHDAD, IRAQ**  
**Office of the Spokesperson**

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**For Immediate Release**

**September 14, 2011**

**Secretary of State Hillary Clinton Condemns the Killing of Iraqi Shia Pilgrims**

**September 13, 2011**  
**Washington, D.C.**

In remarks at the release of the 13th International Religious Freedom Report, Secretary Clinton condemned the killing of a group of Shia pilgrims in Iraq, saying:

Now, as you know, the protection of religious freedom is a fundamental concern of the United States going back to the earliest days of our republic, and it remains so today.

As we look around the world, in fact, we see many countries where governments deny their people the most fundamental human rights: the right to believe according to their own conscience – including the freedom to not believe or not follow the religion favored by their government; the right to practice their religion freely, without risking discrimination, arrest, or violence; and the right to educate their children in their own religious traditions; and the freedom to express their beliefs.

[...]

Of course, threats to the free exercise of conscience and religion do not always come directly from governments. Just yesterday, we heard reports that gunmen masquerading as security officers waylaid a bus of Shia pilgrims traveling throughout western Iraq. The women were abandoned by the side of the road, but the 22 men were shot, and their bodies left in the middle of the desert. This sort of hateful, senseless violence has no aim other than to undermine the fabric of peaceful society.

In the Middle East and North Africa, the transitions to democracy have inspired the world, but they have also exposed ethnic and religious minorities to new dangers. People have been killed by their own neighbors because of their ethnicity or their faith. In other places, we've seen governments stand by while sectarian violence, inflamed by religious animosities, tears communities apart.

Now, the people of the region have taken exciting first steps toward democracy—but if they hope to consolidate their gains, they cannot trade one form of repression for another.

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For video of the Secretary's remarks please visit <http://bcove.me/t0obhpto>.

A full transcript of the remarks can also be found at  
<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2011/09/172254.htm>.